

Posted by u/SpacePaladin15 4 hours ago  

The Final Farewell

OC OC

The last sands in the hourglass of the universe were falling, with a grim finality. Time was penning life's epilogue, and there was naught we could do but spectate.

The multitude of stars that spanned the night sky had vanished long ago, as the universe's expansion outpaced the speed of light. Generations were raised in darkness, knowing the heavens only as a cold, empty expanse. Not even our own sun remained in the sky; it had gone nova long ago. Our artificial habitat was hanging on by a thread, scraping by on the last dregs of recycled energy.

My role, as Gatekeeper, was a ceremonial role inherited from my ancestors. Space travel had become a rarity; in this era, the energy needed for a hyperdrive was wasteful. So it came as surprise when a transmission, from an alien ship, came through on our comms.

—*Hello, old friends.*

Memories flooded through my neural link, a collective remembrance of sorts. **Humans**, they called themselves. A Type 4 civilization from the planet Earth.

I knew why they'd come. They were here to say good-bye, one last time.

We haven't heard from you in millenia, I transmitted back.

We thought them unspectacular, when we first met them. Humans burst onto the galactic scene, with the usual aspirations of peace and prosperity. They peppered us with curious questions, lapping up knowledge like a sponge. Their eagerness to learn and adapt was commendable, but not special.

We didn't realize how deep their desire for knowledge burned. Not then, at least.

We took them under our wing, soon becoming their closest ally. The Terran Republic made itself a relevant player in the political sphere with ease. Their juvenile charm helped them slip under the radar, while they endeared themselves to the powers that be.

There was a reason nobody invaded them, even as their colonies sat ripe for the taking. Everyone liked the humans. They were so vibrant, and full of life. Nobody else could have gotten away with playing all sides of the Galactic War, except for them.

—*Well, you haven't reached out yourself. How are you?*

Centuries turned to millennia, as they always did. Humans mapped every corner of our galaxy, pushed the boundaries of science, and became an established trading empire. While most species would have been satisfied with that pinnacle of civilization, the humans wanted more.

More seemed to be the defining word in their lexicon. There was some impulse that drove them; one that our scientists could never quite identify. It was not their craftiness that helped them ascend, but their stubbornness.

Even with FTL travel, the amount of time and effort it would take to explore the universe was staggering. But the humans were not content with our little corner of reality, and pressed ever further into the final frontier. Generations dedicated their lives to expansion, knowing full well that they would never see the results of their labor.

We miss the old days. We miss our home, I answered. *We miss you.*

The strange humans. Where others saw impossibility, they saw a challenge yet unsolved. They were determined to crack the limitations of their physical bodies; to pry the scythe out of the Reaper's hands, if need be. They wished to break the material binds that caused such strife; to supply energy on the scale of a star.

We watched in amazement as they achieved all they desired, and more. Dyson Spheres dropped up around stars, accruing the energy of a thousand worlds. Anti-aging breakthroughs allowed us to live longer than ever imagined. Medicine rendered disease a thing of the past.

The galaxy soared to a utopian era, on the backs of human technology. But somehow, they still were not content. These grand accomplishments were not enough.

—*We miss you too. I wish we had more time.*

More time. What a human thing to say.

If they truly missed us, why had they become so distant? By my judgment, it seemed humanity was bored of us. Beyond us, even.

We wondered what the humans were searching for, even as they saw the universe crumbling around them. They resented the whims of times; those who spoke to them found them bitter and cold.

Billions of cycles swept by in a blur, and the solar system succumbed to the years. Earth was a long-gone memory, a shadow of their past. They became a species hardly recognizable as human; quiet and reclusive. They fused their minds with computers,

transcending to a level of thought beyond any carbon-lifeform. They stowed away in alternate realities, to experience time at a slower rate. It was their way of prolonging the inevitable; packing an eternity into a single second.

And despite their best efforts, time caught up to humanity all the same.

Why did you leave us, humans?

I guessed at the answer, before their reply came through. They were a species that was fundamentally unhappy. No matter what goals they achieved, the satisfaction never lasted. Reality never lived up to the dreams inside their heads.

—We were looking for a purpose.

Staring out at the lifeless void of space, I thought I understood. We saw the universe now, as the humans always did. As a futile race against time, where all accomplishments eventually meant nothing. From the beginning, they lived with the constant awareness of their mortality. The pressing knowledge that we were destined to die and be forgotten; that the blip of our universe would be washed out by a permanent heat death.

Entropy. An endless nothing.

The humans wanted to be more than nothing.

Did you find what you were looking for?

—It was right in front of us, the entire time.

What did that even mean? Why did they speak in riddles?

If the humans had discovered the meaning of life, I wanted to know. It was the least they could do, as a final farewell to an old friend. There had to be some solace, hidden amidst the existential dread.

I don't understand.

—You don't have to.

—We know what we must do. What we were destined to create.

—This time, we'll get it right.